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## EFFECTS OF THOMSONIAN MEDICINES.

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[Communicated for the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.]

THE capsicum annuum, the lobelia inflata, and the myrica cerifera, are the medicines most commonly used by the Thomsonian class of practitioners. Not forgetting the mighty power of steam, the two first may be called their *Sampson* and *Goliath*; while the last, with a few minor articles, are subalterns in their crusades against the learning and experience of physicians, from Hippocrates to the present day. "If," say they, "we succeed in our warfare against the Faculty, and establish the use of these pure and *harmless* medicines, disease of every form will be deprived of its power, and death cheated of every victim till the decay of old age shall wind out the thread of human life." It has generally been thought that *silent neglect* on the part of scientific men was the best mode of treating such kind of ignorant and absurd medical pretensions. The fundamental and peculiar notions of Thomson are deistical in their character, and cannot bear the searching light of truth. Reason, revelation and science, as well as the common experience of mankind, if candidly applied to those notions, at once refute them. Its malign spirit assails all that is lovely and of good report in religion, literature and science. Its temper and claims can only find a full response in the minds of the weak and credulous, or the ignorant, passionate and superstitious. Openly denouncing all the learned professions, the system has thus won for its disciples a way to notoriety and fortune, by appealing to the worst passions of the human heart, and by catering to the most vicious, low, and groundless prejudices of mankind. This is perfectly apparent throughout the writings of its notorious author. Thomson is dead, and his system already shows internal signs of being brought to nought, by the disagreement of his votaries. They forget, that in their ambitious aspirings, each to become a leader in the great battle against science, they are unfolding to the world the humbuggery, selfishness and dishonesty of the whole scheme. Like Mormonism, its counterpart in theology, a full exposure of its character tends quickly to annihilate the delusion; and the day cannot be far distant, when, as *systems*, both will only be remembered with wonder at the successful cheat. Thomson's numerous followers, in order still longer dishonestly

"to patch the rents in their fortunes," are assuming other forms of medical absurdity, and make easy changes from folly to foolishness, and weave new and varied features in their web of deceptive medical pretensions. Hence we find the Thomsonian changing his name to "root doctor," "botanic physician," "eclectic," "analytic," or "mesmeric" curer of *all* disease.

There has been a great reluctance on the part of the medical profession to condescend to appear as the public exposers of the evils resulting from the use of Thomsonian medicines. Ten years ago there were several families in this vicinity that made very free and exclusive use of Thomsonian medicine. Their number has now dwindled almost to a unit. The writer watched with intense interest the systematic use of these medicines in numerous instances. While studying this kind of pathology, and availing myself of the somewhat rare opportunity of making clinical and *post-mortem* observations in these cases, I have sometimes been shocked at the unnatural and homicidal treatment. A few cases are here briefly stated from my note book, from which, with numerous others of a similar character, the toxicological inferences are made.

A case of strongly-marked pneumonic inflammation, in a lady aged about 50, had been treated for seven days by "courses" of Thomsonian medicine, administered by her own sister—and *of course* terminated fatally. The *post-mortem* appearances were, an almost entire adhesion of the pulmonary and costal pleuræ in both cavities of the chest; while gray hepatization had taken place throughout nearly every portion of the substance of the lungs. The mucous membrane of the fauces and œsophagus was intensely red, dry and corrugated; while that of the stomach and intestines had become thickened, livid and wrinkled from the same inflammatory agents. In this case a dark and fetid diarrhœa, with paralysis of the limbs, occurred a few days before death.

A case of cynanche trachealis in a child, terminated fatally the third day, treated with cayenne tea. A *post-mortem* dissection showed a very strong adventitious membrane extending from the top of the larynx below the bifurcation of the bronchia. The sufferings of this poor victim were said to have been almost terrific. His constant cries were for cold water—till death came to end his sufferings and rebuke such ignorant and barbarous treatment.

Several cases of acute pulmonary inflammation could be mentioned, where, under the Thomsonian practice, delirium, coma, and partial paralysis, occurred the second or third day—and were promptly relieved by a change to the appropriate antiphlogistic treatment.

A case of colic, in a female, from vitiated biliary secretion and immense quantities of scybale in the colon, had well nigh terminated fatally, treated by steam and lobelia. The patient was assured by her "botanic physician" that "she had gall stones as large as chestnuts," and that the continued use of lobelia would enable her to puke them up—on the assumption that the interior of the human body was one continuous cavity. The suffering of this patient was most intense for several

days. She would, however, occasionally obtain freedom from pain several hours by the narcotic and paralytic effects of the lobelia. The use of an infusion of the seeds by injection would produce extreme prostration, cold sweats, and complete paralysis of all the voluntary muscles. This perilous condition would usually last four or five hours, when the colicky pain would return with increased severity. These hazardous experiments were continued for several days, aggravating her malady, till, apparently in *articulo-mortis*, her monomania left her. She dismissed her quacks, and eagerly swallowed the proper cathartic remedies. She quickly recovered. This patient had been accustomed, during her ordinary state of health, frequently to take a heaped tablespoonful of pulverized cayenne, with a sprinkle of lobelia, at a single dose—by way of cordial. She usually complained more or less of indigestion, constriction and hardness of the bowels, and incipient paralysis.

This woman died a year ago of uterine hemorrhage—from retained placenta after abortion at the fourth month. Her treatment, according to the neighbors, consisted of cayenne injections and hot drops by the mouth, to arrest the hemorrhage. She became faint, and in this state lobelia was given her. She soon became paralytic—more was given to carry out the *theory*—she grew cold, and died—the quacks standing aglath at the bed-side, and affirming that “she could not take enough to cure her”!

A woman, aged about 50, wife of a very ignorant man who had paid Thomson \$20 for the “right” to administer as much lobelia and cayenne to his family as he chose, died after taking more than fifty “courses.” At first she had only slight dyspeptic symptoms, which steadily increased under such acro-narcotic and heating treatment—till at last severe abdominal disease was induced, attended with diarrhoea and permanent paralysis of nearly all the voluntary muscles.

Another equally ignorant fellow, who had paid the same bonus for the good of his own family, often declared, in the spirit of the unholy delusion, that with the use of Thomson’s medicine “he would defy the Almighty to take one of his children by disease, if they had never taken “*mineral poison*”!! He tried his prowess on three of his children attacked with slight dysenteric symptoms; their distressing and speedy deaths soon rebuked his ignorant and blasphemous pretensions.

A few years since a case occurred in this town, attended by the following circumstances. A young man, about 20 years of age, living with a family that was perfectly monomaniac on the utility and harmlessness of Thomsonian medicines, had an attack of the prevailing influenza. He took “courses” of medicine under the direction of a Thomsonian quack from Fitchburg. For three weeks he was drugged with lobelia and bayberry bark—every increase of bad symptoms only requiring, according to the “theory,” an increase of those harmless medicines. Under this treatment he became insane, and paralytic in his lower extremities—and probably would under that treatment have remained incurable. The Selectmen of the town were applied to for his removal to the State Lunatic Hospital. This led to a proper medical

investigation of the case: and under the authority of the town, the patient was temporarily removed from the *moral* and *physical* influence of such a *theory* and *practice*. All Thomsonian medicines were prohibited—he took purgatives and anodynes, and in two weeks was perfectly well.

In chronic derangements of health, the morbid effects of the occasionally-repeated use of Thomsonian medicines are much less conspicuous than in acute diseases. Their deleterious effects, however, are not less certain—and the toxicology and pathology of such cases are worthy of more extensive clinical and *post-mortem* observations. The stomach, of course, must suffer primarily from the acrid and burning compounds it is made to receive. The mucous and muscular coats generally assume a very chronic and often incurable form of inflammation; sometimes becoming highly irritable, but most commonly exhibiting extreme atony. The mucous membrane of the small intestines becomes thickened; the muscular coat contracts very feebly and unequally, producing a constricted, tense and indurated feel of this portion of the bowels. The large intestines, though generally torpid and oppressed with distressing flatus and scybalæ, yet sometimes become highly irritable, attended with colic or diarrhœa. The secretions from the lining membrane of the alimentary canal become greatly vitiated—generally excessively acid with mucus. All the collatitious viscera also become greatly deranged in their secretory functions. The countenance of such patients generally becomes sallow and cadaveric, and of such a peculiar expression as bespeaks serious abdominal disease, often attended with paralysis or partial insanity. The pretension of Thomsonians that their remedies are perfectly inert in health, and cannot possibly do harm in disease, is in itself a ridiculous absurdity, and bears *prima facie* evidence of deception and knavery in those who advocate it. That they do induce lasting morbid changes in the solids and fluids of the human system in chronic disease, and that they always goad on to alarming effects, or fatal termination, all truly acute, sthenic inflammatory diseases, has been abundantly shown by clinical observation, as well as by the disclosures of the dissecting knife. The more prominent toxicological and pathological effects thus shown, are, a diseased state of the mucous membrane of the alimentary canal; a torpid, constricted and indurated condition of the several intestinal tunics; and partial or general paralysis of the voluntary muscles—accompanying, or alternating with, a degree of insanity. Such is evidently their combined effect; the particular or special influence of each article in producing these results, cannot be so clearly shown; and it is not improbable that the *moral effect* of a long-continued belief in Thomson's absurd and irrational theory, may, like *fanaticism in religion*, often result in partial insanity.

December, 1847.



## CHARITY INSTITUTIONS OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK.

To the Editor of the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.

DEAR SIR,—With the impression that a brief description of the charity institutions of this city would interest your readers, and knowing your desire to furnish them with all that is valuable relating to medical science, I improve the present opportunity of furnishing some account of these charities. So extensive are they, that New York may be truly styled the most benevolent city in the world. The *data* herein given are facts, the principal part of which have been gathered from personal observation.

New York supports 7000 persons in her charity institutions. These are the Bellevue Hospital, the Penitentiary and Penitentiary Hospital, the Lunatic Asylum, and the Nursery Hospital. Besides, "a large sum is annually distributed to thousands of poor, whose destitution, sickness and misery call for the exhibition of the city's charity." The 7000 individuals mentioned above, are mostly at the Bellevue Hospital and the other public institutions on Blackwell's and Randall's Islands; a few, however, are found in the City Prison, so that the apparent discrepancy in the statements about to be made relative to the number of persons in each institution, will be accounted for by taking this into consideration.

The largest of these institutions is the Bellevue Hospital. Here are 3000 persons, the greater part of which are inmates of the Alms House proper, the number of patients not exceeding 600 at the time of writing. Dr. Reese is the Resident Physician at this Hospital, and it is but just to say that he discharges his arduous duties with credit to himself and to the institution of which he has the medical charge. His urbanity of manner, as well as his politeness to strangers who visit Bellevue, are not the least of his virtues. He has nine or ten assistants. There are four consulting physicians and surgeons, and twelve visiting physicians. Among the distinguished gentlemen who constitute this board, are Professors Stevens, Mott and Parker. By a late city ordinance, members of the medical and surgical board regularly attend Bellevue, so that these poor patients are better provided for than those of any similar institution (it is a free hospital, being the City's Poor House) with which I am acquainted.

Here was the late scene of ship fever, where it raged (or rather accumulated, as the emigrants increased in numbers); and probably no institution in this country reports more favorable results respecting the treatment of this disease than the one now under consideration. With these results your readers are already fully familiar.

There are many old and infirm persons here, a class very likely to be found in such an establishment. Disease of every variety and type is seen here. The spacious buildings are well ventilated, the wards kept remarkably clean, the accommodations commodious, and the furniture and other conveniences ample. The inmates are well clothed and well provided with beds, &c.

But the institution, with all its blessings and comforts, is not without its disadvantages. It is the general receptacle of the poor, and, like all other alms houses, it receives both *the virtuous* and *the vicious*. Here they become one family. The danger and mischief of such a policy is too obvious to need comment. This evil requires the serious consideration and action of the directors of these institutions. *Philanthropists* will here find a field worthy their attentions, and all good citizens should unite to reform so prominent an evil.

The Honorable Moses G. Leonard, Commissioner of the Alms House, in his communication to the Honorable the Common Council of the City and County of New York, dated May 17, 1847, has pointed out the disadvantages of the present alms-house system, and recommended a "proper classification" of paupers as one of the remedies for the pernicious influence alluded to above. By the Commissioner's plan there should be a *discrimination* between those who have become poor from "misfortune," and those who are rendered so by "crime," and the deadly influence of the latter class over the morals and character of the former should be averted by suitable arrangements. The document I refer to is worthy of perusal by all who are interested in the welfare and comfort of the poor—not to mention the religious and moral bearings that these things have on the *virtuous poor* who are thus exposed.

Belonging to the same group of public institutions are the hospitals on Blackwell's Island, four miles from the City Hall. These consist of the Penitentiary and Penitentiary Hospital, the Lunatic Asylum, the Nursery, &c. I will speak of the Penitentiary department first. This department contains 1000 persons of both sexes. Individuals are found here suffering from different diseases, but venereal complaints are by far the most common. There are generally between 200 and 300 on the sick list, the major portion of whom are dissolute females, mostly affected with syphilis. This disease is here exhibited in all its Protean shapes, especially in the female wards—chancres, buboes and morbid growths are to be seen in every form and in every stage of their progress. There is a very interesting case of syphilitic rupia among them. The patient has been in nearly two years. I understand that she is a virtuous woman, and that she contracted the disease from her husband. She is getting better under the free employment of the iodide of potash. I saw two cases of phagadenic syphilitic ulceration. In one of these patients the *mons veneris* was eaten away, scarcely a vestige of hair remaining on the pubis. The place presented a deep and filthy excavation. She was improving, at least she was better than when she came in. The sloughing process had abated, and the patient was not so feeble as she had been. The treatment in this case had been tonics and anodynes, and a yeast poultice had been kept over the ulcer. The doctor said he should soon commence giving her the *iod. hydr.* with some opiate to allay irritation. The other case of phagadenia was not so far advanced; it was situated in the groin, involving, by its extent, the labia of the affected side. Treatment the same as the other.

As I said before, patients in both the male and female wards present

the disease in all its forms. Those desirous of investigating it are afforded here every opportunity and facility for pursuing this branch of study and practice.

Gonorrhœa and its sequelæ are frequently met with—often in conjunction with syphilitic disease. I have spent considerable time in these wards, and am prepared to say that the practice of this Hospital is remarkably successful; especially when we take into consideration that a great majority of the patients are subject to complicated disease, persons of broken constitutions, and many of them (male and female) having to be treated for *delirium tremens* before the antiphlogistic treatment can with any propriety be employed. The *secondary* and *tertiary* forms are perhaps more frequent than the *primary*; but many patients come here with the disease for the first time, though they do not always (nor in the great majority of instances) apply for aid in season. The beast has already set his "mark" in the forehead, and the poor victim is doomed to wear it all his days; *reformation* will not remove the curse. The treatment of the primary cases consists chiefly (besides regimen) in the administration of calomel and opium—R. Protochlorid. hydr., grs. vj.; pulv. opii, grs. iij. M. et div. in chart. vj. Give one powder three times a day. Calomel is undoubtedly the best mercurial, in this complaint. Its combination with opium is a most valuable adjunct, as all who have had opportunities for testing its merits in actual practice will affirm. I have so combined it in private practice, not being aware that it was much employed in this manner by others. In cases of any irritation about the genital organs, a distressing *general irritation* soon extends over the whole body. This is strikingly the case in venereal complaints. The addition of opium, then, to the calomel, is a happy resort, the anodyne soothing the general disturbance, and also quieting the local irritation. But the principal reason for this combination is, it assists us in obtaining the mercurial action more speedily than we can do without it; and this is accounted for, I think, very satisfactorily, opium having the power of diminishing all the secretions except those of the skin, and the secretions from this organ are promoted by its use; the result is, the mercury is retained in the system, and is gradually diffused throughout the body, its own peculiar odor generally being discovered in a few days. Consequently less of the drug is required in a given case; and debility, and other inconveniences necessarily dependent on the long-continued administration of it, are avoided.

The next to be spoken of is the Lunatic Asylum, on the same Island, with its 700 patients, the greater part of whom are females. Dr. Ranney, the Resident Physician, has talent and address which well qualify him for his position. Dr. R. informs me that little medicine is used in treating these patients, unless they are suffering from fever or some other corporeal disease. Dr. R. has much confidence in *moral* treatment. The doctor's bearing towards his patients is kind and indulgent. During my visit to this Hospital, no one thing gave me more pleasure than to observe the attachment these poor patients had for their physician. When he entered a ward, their countenances lighted

up with a joyful expression that evinced that a friend had come to minister to them. The more rational were polite and quiet, others saluted me as good-naturedly as one could wish them to do. Many of them conversed with my friend and myself, and felt flattered by this indulgence. Some of the females were highly delighted because the doctor permitted them to hang on his arm as he passed the wards; showing, with many other things, that *kindness* took the place of the "straight jacket." Of course there are some patients who are so furious that they are necessarily confined in snug apartments.

Many patients are cured or improved at this institution, which, considering the kind of patients who inhabit it, is complimentary both to the city of New York, and the physician who has charge of it. The causes of mania are as various here as in similar establishments, no one cause having any particular preponderancy. The buildings are spacious, and consist of two wings running at right angles from an octagon, the sides of which are from 30 to 35 feet wide. Other buildings for this department are now in progress. The grounds are high, and the location healthy.

On Blackwell's Island, also, are the new Alms House and the Small-pox Hospital. These contain from 40 to 50 patients. These establishments are in charge of Assistant Physicians, and are regularly attended by members of the visiting Board.

The Nursery Hospital, near the middle of the Island, is conducted in every respect as well as the other institutions; indeed, it is under the same regulations, and is a part of the same charity establishment. Dr. Hall is the Resident Physician. His faithfulness to the little ones in his care entitles him to much respect; and should he prove as competent as his late predecessor (Dr. Winterbotham), he will earn a reputation that will long survive.

Diseases of the respiratory system, purulent and strumous ophthalmia, scrofula in all its forms, are the most frequent diseases—though all complaints incident to infancy and childhood are here exhibited. A degree of success attends the treatment of these disorders, that could not be calculated upon *a priori*. These patients being the offspring of diseased parents, the constitutions they inherit, already depraved, are rendered still worse by exposure, filth and starvation.

There are from 1000 to 1200 children in this institution. The number on the sick list is small at this time. The home that is provided for these children is comparatively a happy one. The inmates are sheltered, fed, clothed and instructed much better than many children who are not acknowledged poor. In passing through their rooms, the tear of joy steals unwittingly down the cheek, as we contemplate happiness presiding over the circle of the destitute, the orphan, the forsaken—all now protected, guided and instructed, and this by the public charities.

The kindness of the physician, the matron and the nurses, should not be referred to without alluding to another who feels and cares for the destitute, who looks after these little ones with no ordinary degree of interest; who in many ways has been to them a protector, and whose

fatherly care over them, both for the present and the future, ought not to be passed unnoticed. I again refer to the author of the document above quoted. This gentleman, besides anxiously providing the "*real necessities*," often secures for them something like luxuries. During holidays, and on those occasions when other hearts are made glad, when side boards and tables are loaded with fat things, these children are remembered. The Commissioner provides for them a Thanksgiving or a New Year's entertainment. Illustrative of this, the poet, in his stanzas entitled "*The Children of New York*," has the following lines:—

"Your voices join in singing—  
Sweet childhood's fit employ;  
Ye welcome LEONARD bringing  
Your annual gift of joy."

The Nursery buildings on Blackwell's Island are very poor, or rather unsuited to the object, having been constructed for other purposes; but the inmates are soon to be transferred to Randall's Island, about four miles from the former, in the same waters, the East River, where ample buildings are in progress for their reception. The plan is that recommended by the Commissioner in his communication to the Common Council last May. This work has been carried on rapidly since its commencement, and when finished, the establishment will be a Nursery for "the world to pattern after." Nine buildings are nearly completed. No. 1 is built of stone; it is the centre building, and contains school rooms, the chapel, and is the residence of the family of the Superintendent. On either side of this, receding 10 feet from a front line, and 150 feet from the main building, are two other houses for the larger children—one for boys and one for girls: 125 feet from these are two others, about 45 by 65 feet; one a kind of quarantine, or reception for new comers or those who are suffering from infectious diseases—the other for nursery children from 2 to 5 years old, before they go to the department of the older children. 200 feet in the rear of the main building are two hospitals, 150 feet apart, 35 by 60 feet, with verandahs enclosed within the sash, to be opened for ventilation by raising the sash. These are constructed with apartments for the sick, and separate ones for the convalescent. A large kitchen is between these two hospitals, so that cooking and the like does not in the least interfere with the sick; an arrangement which I consider of vast importance. There is also a house, 20 by 25 feet, for the residence of idiots. Also a large building for doing all the cooking except the hospital cooking. The above establishments are furnished with warm and cold baths. Croton water is conveyed across a branch of the East River, through an inverted syphon. The inmates are thus supplied with pure water, in quantities sufficient for all purposes. The location is good, on high ground, commanding a view of East River and Long Island, and everything has been done with a view to the health of the inmates of the establishment. Randall's Island contains about 160 acres, and is the property of the city. Its original cost was \$52,000; when the buildings are finished, this amount will be increased to \$100,000 more. The children will have

good air, spacious grounds for exercise, and those who are old enough, and are otherwise qualified, will have abundant opportunities for horticultural and agricultural pursuits.

The above will give some idea of the city's charities; but it does not comprehend all. It only alludes to a particular group; the expenses for out-door alms, for chaplains to the different institutions, &c. &c., having hardly been hinted at. Much yet remains for New York to do, though she is now in advance of her sister cities.

I beg leave to refer all who are interested in the subject of "well-regulated and well-governed alms houses," &c., to the communication of Mr. Leonard, to which I am indebted for much that this paper contains; and I am also greatly indebted to the gentleman himself for much important information relative to it. His politeness and attention to those who are in the pursuit of this kind of information, is only equalled by the interest and zeal he displays in his department, and the qualifications he possesses for the discharge of his official duties.

The most objectionable institution included in this group, is the Smallpox Hospital. It is a small wooden building, and is (I should judge) badly ventilated. Moreover it is for the accommodation of all persons who have variola, unless the patient is able to pay his expenses at a private hospital; so that the rich and the poor are equally candidates for this place, and in instances of epidemic smallpox are liable to be crowded together indiscriminately into this contracted apology for a hospital. *The medical profession* of the city of New York should attend to this matter. I should think that there was but little of this disorder prevailing at present. A friend of mine has had a case of the distinct variety in ——— street. No medicine was employed; the patient was trusted to the *vis medicatrix nature*, and recovered.

New York, December, 1847.

CLAUDIAN.

#### FEMALES AND THEIR DISEASES.\*

[Communicated for the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.]

THIS is a clever, a very clever book. It is *unique* in its method, and truly felicitous in its execution. Its form, letters, is not new. If we remember, Morgagni's great quartos are in letters, too. We have to trust to a somewhat ancient memory here, for we lent our Morgagni about *thirty* years ago, and our good friend uses him still. Our Professor's work is new in its tone, its spirit. If, as he says somewhere, he "went into his lecture room with his heart in his hand," he certainly has dipped his pen in his own heart while writing his book. It is so fresh, so earnest, so trustful and so truthful, that we cannot but thank him, and feel relieved from the least grateful responsibilities of criticism

\* *Females and their Diseases*; a series of Letters to his Class, by Charles D. Meigs, M.D. Professor of Midwifery in the Jefferson Medical College at Philadelphia, &c. &c. Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard.

while we read, and while we write. It were most unreasonable to expect a perfect book. Why, the author tells us that it has been written, submitted to a friend, and printed, since May of this 1847—in about *six months*. Why a *fœtus* would not have been *viable* at that time of gestation, unless an *exceptional* *fœtus*. The Horatian 9 years, more or less, have not been in the remotest sense completed in this birth. But who will say that it is *premature*? Who will say that it will not live? Not we. No, we feel that it has its life in itself; and if this be *exceptional*, it will be for a short time only. It will not long be its office merely to prove the *rule*.

Let the reader bear in mind another fact in this volume's rare history, besides that of the time of its incubation. It has been made expressly for the Professor's class. It is dedicated, and presented to *them*. The reason? Prof. Meigs says, "I could never find time, in the winter curriculum, to fulfil my duties as Lecturer on Diseases of Females and Children. I have taken occasion to speak to my class through the press. In doing so, I cannot but stand before the public."—p. vi.

This reason for publishing explains another fact in the volume. We mean the frequent references to what has been said in the lecture room, and which the author supposes is so well known that he need only allude to it. The work, therefore, is in no sense elementary, or rather systematic. It rather fills a gap, a very important one, too, which want of time occasioned in the writer's *prælections*, and is so of very great value to his class. Its interest, however, is not confined to them. It commends itself to the medical man, whatever may have been his study, or his practice. It treats of matters of every-day professional occurrence, in a way to be highly useful. It is the work of an earnest, well-taught man; and is that man *speaking, talking*, to his reader, as to his companion and friend. He speaks of the "*freedom and abandon*" which characterize his book. This is in his Introductory Letter to his class. To feel the book, the reader must take it as if addressed to him also. All sorts of styles are in the composition of these Letters, and there is license in the method for them all. They are colloquial, narrative, grave, humorous, didactic, sketchy. What was in the author's mind at the moment, finds its ready language in the aspect in which it was seen, and is off-hand given to the reader. These Letters cannot fail to attract attention. They will certainly reward their readers.

It was hardly possible to avoid one consequence of the author's method of teaching a science. This is diffuseness. The same thing is said often, and frequently in an amount of language which a desire to be perspicuous, apparently renders necessary, or which rapidly writing prevents one from observing. We give a single example:

"When a woman has suffered from such an accident (labial thrombus), it must be expected, if the injury be of a grave character, that she will have great pain and constitutional disturbance from it. I need not say, that you ought not to leave the nerve system to the unmitigated perception of such painful impressions; but that you ought to quell both its impressible and perceptive faculties, by keeping them within



moderate bounds, by the use of anodyne medicines in some convenient form ; such as Dover's powder, which may be repeated in doses of four grains every two, four or six hours, until the therapeutical end of its exhibition is attained."—p. 67. Now as description and treatment had just been given, a severer method or style must have been contented with adding, for pain, give Dover's powder. The rapidity of composition was a cause, or the explanation of other occasional inadvertences, which perhaps are too few to be referred to. In Letter vii. on ruptured labium, Prof. Meigs says :—

"Let me warn you against the risk of cutting the perineum with the child's elbow. \* \* \* olecranon cuts the tissue like a knife."—p. 69.

When speaking of the union of such a wound, the author, at p. 71, says, "How, indeed, could we expect such a union of parts (by first intention), not cut by a sharp instrument, but torn by violence. The raw surfaces are surfaces of laceration, and can, in the general, only be re-accommodated by the process of granulation—a tedious process." The idea conveyed by the wording of the two passages is not precisely the same.

What the author says of the danger of the perineum from the elbow is very important. It occurs in those cases in which the hand in a cranial presentation is applied to the throat or face, "for the ulna of the child lies in contact with the posterior wall of the vagina, and as it slides forth, and comes to press with its olecranon on the fourchette, that olecranon cuts the tissue like a sharp knife, &c. &c." This is familiar to every practitioner of the least observation, and it seems impossible in any case that rupture should be prevented. A proper support of the perineum will do this. We cannot refrain from noting here what our author had no special occasion to refer to, but which is perhaps as frequent a cause of perineal laceration as the one he so particularly mentions. We mean the *shoulder*. This is specially the case in instrumental labor. We do not recollect a case in which the perineum has given way while the *head* was passing. The fourchette may have been slightly torn by the head, but the burden of the injury is owing to the shoulder. This is true of lacerations in natural labor. The reason is obvious. We can give perfect support to the perineum when the head is upon it. We can favor the curve made by the head after it is fairly engaged in the arch, and is passing the external organs. But the pressure of the shoulder is guarded with difficulty, and especially is it difficult to accommodate the part to the passages. The slight and harmless wound produced by the head is liable to most troublesome increase by the shoulder, or grave lesion may have its whole cause in the passage of the same part.

Prof. Meigs treats of the *laceration of the labium*, and with his characteristic practical good sense. We have met with one instance only of this fracture in many years' practice. In this the perineum was obstinately undilatable, and the pains rapid and forcible beyond precedent. The woman, from long suffering, had fallen into that state of unreason which puts all caution and attempts at control out of the question.

She was bled profusely. Still the perineum remained unchanged. The scalp was forced through the external organs, and pressed upon the perineum with an edge like a knife, the part itself being so thinned by pressure that one could hardly pronounce where perineum ended or scalp begun. Pressure was steadily maintained. At last, during a most severe effort, the head was suddenly born. The perineum was not at all injured. The left labium was torn entirely through its texture, apparently down to the ramus to which the rent corresponded. The wound healed readily and rapidly. The parts came at once together. They were not disturbed by motion, nor by the passage over them of urine, lochia, or feces. They were soon well, and in subsequent labors nothing untoward occurred.

At the time of the above case, the extract of belladonna was not used, for its alleged power to increase the dilatibility of the textures concerned. Nor was the power of ether in *destroying pain, increasing the secretions, the dilatibility*—and especially in *suspending the action of the will*, and so taking away its power to *check or violently* to add to uterine action, then known. We have witnessed the power of ether to do all these things so often, that we can authoritatively declare it, and add, too, that in our whole observation of it in midwifery practice, it has only done good. We believe there is not the slightest allusion to these agencies in this the latest work in midwifery literature amongst us. It would seem that the use of ether in midwifery had not reached the author, who is one of the most distinguished teachers and practitioners of the art.

We have not designed in this notice of Prof. Meigs's work, to give a review of it. It will give us pleasure to recur to it in a future number, and to give our readers more knowledge of its useful and very pleasant pages. For author and readers, however, we cheerfully perform another office. We would recommend the work to the profession. It contains forty-four letters. Eight of these treat of pregnancy, of its disorders, and of the puerperal state. In these letters we have much that is of daily practical use. The trouble is stated, and the means of relief given from the highest authorities, added to the author's own observation, and so in a small compass much useful knowledge is given.

Finally, Prof. Meigs has sought in his work to give to his brethren, and especially to his class, a book which may be read. In the plurality of our singleness, we would say, that we think he has not failed.

Boston, Dec. 23, 1847.

W. C.

#### "REPREHENSIBLE PRESCRIPTIONS."

To the Editor of the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.

DEAR SIR,—The little article, in your last number, condemnatory of a certain prescription, was doubtless penned by some young gentleman, whose acquaintance with the subject of posology has been obtained more from his dispensatory than from practice. Would it not be pro-

ductive of good, Sir, to the younger portion of the profession, if gentlemen of experience would more frequently record in the Journals, instances of unusual or extra medication which they witness in the course of their practice? I recollect a female patient, in 1824, laboring under a fungous swelling of the knee, who took from forty-five to fifty grains of opium, daily, for many days. In 1843, a lady was under my care afflicted with uterine cancer, the intensity of whose suffering was but partially mitigated for three months by the daily administration of as many grains of sulph. morph. By referring to my book, I find that from June 26 to September 20, she took forty-eight drachms. The largest quantity taken in any one day was one drachm, divided into six doses of ten grains each. Mr. J. I. Brown informs me that he often dispenses a prescription, of from five to seven grains of morphia, by Dr. L., a gentleman with whom I have not the honor of an acquaintance, but whose reputation in this city would not be injuriously affected by any charges of charlatany. In after years, I doubt not, your young friend, should his eye happen to fall upon his last week's strictures, will blush a little at the severity bestowed on one whom he did not know, and smile at the confidence with which his youthful mind put forth the prediction of the fatal results of the prescription.

I am, Sir, &c.

427 Washington st., Dec. 18.

W. W. C.

#### CHLOROFORM—A SUBSTITUTE FOR ETHER.

To the Editor of the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.

DEAR SIR,—Prof. Simpson, of Edinburgh, has lately published a pamphlet upon the use of chloroform as a substitute for ether in preventing the pain of surgical operations. A friend sent me a copy the day it was published, and I have experimented with the article before the students of the Baltimore Dental College. Although the tests have not been complete, as indeed they could not be in the few trials of a new agent in the use of which it was necessary to acquire dexterity and exercise prudence, I am satisfied that chloroform is much superior to ether and not liable to similar objections. I send, with this, a proof sheet of the American Journal of Dental Science, containing Dr. Simpson's account of this new agent.

Very respectfully yours,

Baltimore, Dec. 19, 1847.

C. A. HARRIS.

P. S.—Since the above was written, I have had another opportunity of testing the anæsthetic properties of chloroform in a very difficult operation, and with complete success.

C. A. H.

[The sheet alluded to above has been received. We have space this week only to say that chloroform is the perchloride of formyle—formyle being, in chemical language, the hypothetical radical of formic acid, which latter is obtained from the red ant, and also latterly from sugar, starch, and indeed most other vegetable substances.—Ed.]

## THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF CONNECTICUT.

[Communicated for the Boston Med. and Surg. Journal.]

By Thomas Miner, M.D.

It is at once apparent that incorporations of this sort are designed to produce a diffusion of "true science" among the members of the medical profession. Some discrepancy of opinion still exists in regard to the best manner of conducting such associations.

In submitting a few observations in favor of the operations of that of Connecticut, I have no wish to enter into a controversy with those who entertain views apart from my own. I merely desire, through the "Journal," to lay before its readers some of the leading features of this organization, and the mode by which its interests are best promoted, and its business most satisfactorily conducted.

In accordance with the act of incorporation of this Society, the first State Convention was held by delegation in 1792. Since that period it has continued to be represented by delegates, or fellows, as they are termed, elected by the several county societies. The meetings of the State Society were held twice a year, until 1818; since then, only annually.

In point of practical utility, convenience and harmony, this system of delegation has hitherto operated to the entire satisfaction of all the members of the State Society, and has contributed powerfully to the accomplishment of that object which its founders had in view, viz., "the diffusion of true science, and particularly a knowledge of the healing art." In the State there are eight county societies, which send from three to five fellows each, making, with the officers, about forty in all. By this body all the business of the State Society is transacted. The proceedings are all published, with a list of the fellows, and the members of the Society, together with the annual dissertation, and copies sent to each member of the Society. Members of the Society who are not fellows, are permitted to attend the meetings, and to take part in the proceedings, but do not vote. The effect of our system is such, as to cause almost every physician in the State, to become at once a member of the Society. And in its operation it effectually eradicates the prejudices, brought in the minds of some from abroad, in reference to the system of delegation.

The county societies have ever evinced great liberality in the election of fellows; inclined naturally to the doctrine of rotation, dependent in some degree upon the zeal manifested, by a regular attendance upon the meetings of the Society. The system imparts to all, without partiality, the opportunity of representing, to the parent Society, our interests and our wishes; or rather it renders the fellows elected the servants in office of the different county societies. It is not the least of the beauties of the system, that the duty of fellows is not so onerous, but that those elected cheerfully attend to it; nor is the office so inviting as to create any emulation, or competition for its honors. It appears from statistics

that the attendance of the fellows elected has been good, there not being usually more than one or two absentees.

In this way the business of the Society is more systematically and efficiently transacted than it could possibly be were all the members of the State Society to meet in one body. It is obvious that the fellows elected feel a greater responsibility than they otherwise would; they are bound by stronger motives to attend punctually the annual meetings of the parent Society, and they are better prepared to enter upon the transaction of the business entrusted to them than though these duties belonged alike to all.

*Hartford, December 14, 1847.*

## THE BOSTON MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL.

BOSTON, DECEMBER 29, 1847.

*Tracts on Generation.*—C. R. Gilman, M.D., one of the Faculty of the New York College of Physicians and Surgeons, and Theodore Tellkamp, M.D., a professor in Columbia College, have translated a Tract on Generation, from the German of T. L. G. Bischoff, D.M., Professor of Physiology in Giessen. This is No 1 of a series, and bears this title, viz., "Proofs that the periodic maturation and discharge of ova, are, in the mammalia and the human female, independent of coition, as a first condition of their propagation." It seems that the translators were not aware that a large portion of this tract had appeared in the London Gazette, as long ago as 1845-6, till they had made good progress in their own translation. The tract contains very curious experiments on living animals, some of which were necessarily of a cruel character, and could hardly be justified on the score that the interests of science demanded the solution of a great problem. In reading the details, we could not avoid regretting all the while that the subjects of the experiments could not have been under the benign influence of sulphuric ether during the excision of the internal organs of reproduction. There is no appropriate page for transcribing, with a view to giving a specimen of the author's method of investigation, as the whole text is wanted to show the nature and the results of Dr. Bischoff's investigations. Whenever all the numbers are opened to us in the English language, the real value of the pursuits of the indefatigable Professor of Giessen may be more correctly judged of. Number one is warmly recommended to the watchful examination of students, as it contains much exact knowledge of the first condition of animal life.

*Chailly's Midwifery.*—This well-known work, translated a few years since by Dr. Bedford, of New York, has passed through a second edition in Paris, and of course is improved. It is moreover said that the celebrated Paul Dubois (vid. "Spare Hours of a Student in Paris"), who is at the

head of that department of professional business in France, has a grand treatise now in press, the labor of many years. The same author who gives this intelligence, states the curious fact that most of the physicians of Paris have risen, by their talents, from obscurity, and the lowest classes in the community. Among them, therefore, as might be expected, are those who have coarse manners, and ungainly persons. Of this number is M. Roux, the first physician in the city.

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*British Monthly Record.*—On the first of January, a new Medical Journal will make its appearance in Manchester, England, under the editorial management of Charles Clay, M.D., a faithful and industrious writer. It will bear the following title, viz.: "The British Monthly Record of Obstetric Medicine and Surgery, and the Diseases of Women and Children, illustrated with wood cuts and engravings." From the plan exhibited in the prospectus, it is thought that this will be a valuable medical journal. Obstetric medicine is certainly exciting more attention of late, than formerly; and well it may, since the profession, with a few bright exceptions, have been too much in the habit of considering that, in parturition, nature would take care of herself, and secure a succession of generations, without the efforts of physicians to control such diseases as beset the path of mothers. But we shall not further comment at this point, as another occasion will offer on the reception of Dr. Clay's first number.

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*Health of the Sioux Indians.*—Mr. Riggs writes from *Lac qui Parle*, that the season, up to September, had been one of sickness. Hooping cough, influenza, dysentery, and fever and ague, had been prevalent. Many persons had died—and, at his station, particularly, the mortality was greatest among children. He gave out medicine largely, more in the character of an apothecary than a physician. Frequently, he was requested to assume the responsibility of prescribing, which was done with reluctance. Powows appear to be in little repute with these Indians, who have experienced the benefits of medical assistance from the whites; but, under circumstances of alarm, when it is impossible to procure the advice of a physician, they fall back upon their old superstitious reverence for the tom-tom beat on a rude drum, and the equally inefficacious uproar of a grand powow, under the guidance of the conjuror, or native medicine man. There are fine openings for the benevolent exertions of young physicians, in the Indian regions of the West, where they might spend a season or two with lasting benefit to the poor aboriginals, and perhaps lay the foundation of wealth and influence for themselves, in after years.

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*Medical Hospital Officers in the United States.*—Dr. Gardner, the agreeable author of "Old Wine in New Bottles," states, in the fourteenth chapter, that a large proportion of the hospital medical officers of the United States, are indebted for their situations to rich relations or powerful friends, and not to their genius. Some of them, he continues, have failed to obtain practice, from their ignorance, or rough and brutal manners; while others possess qualifications not unusually enumerated in a medical diploma. "I wish," he remarks, "that I was not obliged to say, that their

professional brethren sometimes lend their charitable, but questionable, aid to their advancement, from an *esprit du corps*, and because they are reluctant to see them dragging on a life of poverty, or descending to charlatanism for a livelihood. Thus the man whom nobody will employ of his own accord, is pronounced to be plenty good enough for the inhabitants of a hospital, whose poverty is the crime for which they have been sentenced to be thus treated within its walls."

This is bold language, well calculated to call out a reply from those who think there is no ground for the assertion so recklessly made.

**Chloroform Inhalation.** MR. EDITOR,—A letter received by the last steamer from Dr. W. J. Little, Surgeon of the London Hospital, and the well-known founder of the Royal Orthopedic Institution, contains, with other interesting medical intelligence, important information concerning the employment of a new agent for producing insensibility during surgical operations and in obstetric cases. This new agent, which it appears is exciting much attention among the English surgeons, is chloroform, a substance first discovered by Soubeiran in France, and at nearly the same time by Liebig in Germany. Its introduction, however, to the medical public as an anæsthetic agent, is due to Professor Simpson, of the Edinburgh University, who has published the result of his experience. The following extracts from the letter to which I have referred, and from Professor Simpson's pamphlet, for which I am also indebted to Dr. Little, contain the most important items relative to this subject. Dr. L. states in his letter that he has tried and witnessed the trial of chloroform, and from his experience thus far feels prepared to say that "the facility and rapidity with which the effect is produced, the absence of annoyance to the inhalers and bystanders, the tranquil manner in which a person who has inhaled recovers from the state of insensibility, and the length of time he remains insensible, even after inhaling the chloroform only thirty or thirty-five seconds, give it prominent advantages over ether." Among other advantages which Dr. Simpson affirms this compound to possess over ether, are—"its having an agreeable, fragrant, fruit-like odor, and a saccharine taste; that a much less quantity of chloroform is requisite to produce the anæsthetic effect, usually from 100 to 120 drops of chloroform only being sufficient, and with some patients much less. I have seen," he says, "a strong person rendered completely insensible by six or seven inspirations of 30 drops of the liquid. Its action is more rapid and complete, and generally more persistent. I have almost always seen from ten to twenty inspirations suffice. Hence the time of the surgeon is saved, and the preliminary stage of excitement is practically abolished. Its perfume is not unpleasant, but the reverse, and the odor of it does not remain for any length of time obstinately attached to the clothes of the attendant, or exhaled in a disagreeable form from the lungs of the patient. No sickness, vomiting, headache, salivation, uneasiness of chest in any of the cases. Being required in much less quantity, it is much more portable than sulph. ether." The above extracts I send you without comment, as of course it is too early to form an opinion, and will only add, that I have employed a chemist to prepare a quantity of this article, with which it is my intention to institute a succession of experiments.

Boston, Dec. 27, 1847.

BUCKMINSTER BROWN.



*Result of Experiments in Boston with Chloroform.* To THE EDITOR.—Sir,—From your apparent interest in the success of my discovery for the alleviation of pain in surgical operations, I have ventured to lay before the readers of your Journal a condensed account of Prof. Simpson's new method of producing insensibility, also the formula for the preparation of the compound used by him, together with the result of his experiments, all of which he kindly forwarded to me by the last steamer, with an acknowledgment of the merit attached to my previous discovery of the application of sulph. ether. The result of his experiments I was resolved to test immediately, and being out of health myself, I called upon Dr. E. R. Smilie, a person of some reputation in chemical science, and invited him to my laboratory. He politely assisted me in preparing and administering the chloroform (the name given to the new compound), also in observing its peculiar effects upon the system. As we were about to apply heat for the purpose of distilling from the mixture of the following formula—chloride of lime, one part; aqueous solution, one part; rectified spirit, one twelfth of a part—a patient opportunely arrived for the purpose of inhaling ether, and having three teeth extracted under its operation. With a little trouble she was persuaded to remain until there was a sufficient quantity of chloroform distilled for the experiment. After inhaling ether and allowing its effect to pass away, about one ounce of chloroform was put upon the sponge previously freed from the effect of sulph. ether, and administered by the usual method. In order to contract this communication as much as possible, we have purposely avoided the details of the case. The teeth were extracted without the knowledge of the patient, and we would say that the effects were similar to those produced by ether.

Yours respectfully,

W. T. G. MORTON.

Saturday, Dec. 25th, 1847.

Dr. Dixon, of New York, will soon bring out a work on hysteric affections, and the physical education of women.—Treatment and Cure of Crétins and Idiots, &c., by Buckminster Brown, M.D., from the American Journal of Medical Sciences, has been re-printed in a pamphlet.—A great homœopathic meeting, or British Society of Homœopaths, was held in London in August, of which Frederick F. Quinn, M.D., is President.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.—Papers have been received from Drs. S. W. Williams of Deerfield, Brown of Wilmington, and Cornell of Boston; also a second notice of Chomel's Elements of Pathology. Dr. Fisher's report of Velpeau's Lectures, alluded to last week, will be deferred till the commencement of vol. 38, in February, that it may all be comprised in one volume.

Erratum.—On page 397, 24th line from top, for "trocar," read touché.

MARRIED.—Dr. James M. Scheley, Savannah, Geo., to Miss M. A. Sullivan.—Dr. Joseph Kittredge, of Andover, Mass., to Miss H. F. Watson.

DIED.—In Leicester, Mass., Dr. Jacob Holmes, 69.—In Tewksbury, Ms., Dr. Henry Kittredge, 61.

Report of Deaths in Boston—for the week ending Dec. 23th. 57.—Males, 26—females, 31.—Stillborn, 4. Of consumption, 6—typhus fever, 6—lung fever, 4—intemperance, 3—inflammation of the bowels, 1—infantile, 6—accidental, 2—child-bed, 1—diarrhoea, 1—smallpox, 2—disease of the bowels, 2—disease of the heart, 2—croup, 2—marasmus, 5—dropsy, 2—dropsy on the brain, 4—convulsions, 2—dysentery, 1—old age, 1—pleurisy, 1—paralysis, 1.

Under 5 years, 20—between 5 and 20 years, 8—between 20 and 40 years, 14—between 40 and 60 years, 9—over 60 years, 6.

*Worms found in the Heart and Bloodvessels of a Dog; Symptoms of Hydrophobia.*—Drs. Jennings, Brown, Thorp, and myself, recently made a post-mortem examination of a dog that died of supposed hydrophobia. The symptoms were those characterizing that disease, and so well marked as to alarm and mislead the entire community. He was one of those much valued hounds, used in hunting negroes; an old dog, whose health had been good; fat, ordinarily remarkably peaceable; but after his attack, the disposition and appearance of the animal were completely changed. He snapped at every living thing near him, assailing dogs, or bitches, acquaintances or strangers indiscriminately; exhibited dread of water; emaciation; convulsions; and death ensued in ten or fifteen days from the time he was first observed to be diseased.

*Autopsy.*—The stomach and other abdominal organs were healthy; but the large bloodvessels were found filled with worms; the heart contained of these at least one hundred. The appearance of the worms was remarkably similar, differing only in length. They were round, white, tapering towards the tail, and from half an inch to four inches long, the thickness varying from one-fourth of a line to one line. I did not note as carefully as I ought the form of the head and mouth, and I believe the same is true of the gentlemen who assisted me in the examination.

Among the number of the bitten dogs was a pointer puppy, which alone showed any symptoms of the same disease. It had two fits, and during the second, leaped from a second story window, and was so injured that its owner had it killed. No dissection was made in this case.

Were the convulsions in these cases excited by worms? In the first case, I think there can be no question that they were, and it is to be regretted that a *sectio* was not made of the body of the second, to determine the fact whether worms existed in it also. Was the disease *hydrophobia*? I should say it was not, from the fact that of the number of animals bitten by the blood-hound, but a single one exhibited signs of disease afterwards. Is it not probable that many of the cases regarded as hydrophobic, are in reality diseases of a different character, resulting from irritation in some part of the system? And may not worms occasionally be the cause of this irritation? The subject appears to me worthy of investigation, and repeated examinations of the bodies of these animals might lead to valuable conclusions.—DR. T. C. OSBORNE, in *Western Medical Jour.*, Oct. 1847.

*The Prickly Ash as a remedial Agent.*—Opposed as we are to the introduction of new articles of doubtful character into our already over-abundant *Materia Medica*, being much more desirous of ascertaining fully and satisfactorily the virtues of those now admitted and acknowledged, we yet give place to the following extract of a letter from an intelligent physician of Washington, in this State:—"You wish to know my views in regard to the Prickly Ash, as a remedial agent. I have scarcely used it enough to predicate an opinion as to its real merits; though I am satisfied from the trials I have made with it in chronic rheumatism and secondary syphilis, that there is no article more deserving the attention of the profession than the one under consideration." Our friend, Dr. Barry, druggist, of this city, is now preparing a syrup from the extract of this article.—*Southern Med. and Surgical Journal*.